RED HORSE Takes to the Sky

First airborne team stands up in Southwest Asia

by Capt Kevin Osborne 819th RHS

Amid chopping sounds of the CH–47 Chinook, the equipment sling-loaded to the helicopter's undercarriage is slowly lowered to the runway below. The slings are cut loose as individuals quickly exit the helicopter. The sun is slowly setting on the horizon, and as the colors dance in the evening haze a glance down the runway reveals two large craters in the center of the strip. The Airborne RED HORSE team quickly moves in for repairs. Their mission: open the runway for follow-on forces.

RED HORSE is blazing trails again — this time, from the air. The Airborne RED HORSE concept was developed to meet the vision of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force that combatant commanders have an airborne airfield assessment and repair capability. The purpose of ARH units is to "assess, prepare and establish" contingency air bases in remote locations through air-drop, air-insertion or air-delivery.

In the Fall of 2001, the 819th RED HORSE Squadron, Malmstrom Air Force Base, MT, took the lead on this new initiative. MSgt Mike DeShon began learning all about U.S. Army airfield damage repair operations with the 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, NC, and 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Fort Campbell, KY.

"There was a lot of preliminary research that needed to be accomplished," said Sergeant DeShon. "We wanted to make sure we talked with the right people, listened to their concerns, and then drafted our own concept of operations based on our findings."

Instant communication lines were established between the 82nd Division's 618th Engineering Company and the 101st Division's 887th Engr. Co. These companies use a light airfield repair package for expedient crater repair on runways. Their unique task is to support the forcible entry and airfield seizure missions of their respective brigades. The 618th accomplishes this through airborne techniques, while the 887th uses air assault tactics.

Utilizing a new mobile airfield repair equipment set, or MARES, RED HORSE proceeded to combine both of these capabilities to accomplish the objective. In December, the 1st Expeditionary RED HORSE Group commander, Col Terry Crummett, contracted with Readiness Management Support, through the Air Force Contract Augmentation Program, to procure the first MARES and have it delivered to SWA.

With the 819th Expeditionary RED HORSE Squadron heavily tasked supporting more than $27 million in construction

Members of the 819th Expeditionary RED HORSE assemble with the MARES, establishing the first-ever Airborne RED HORSE team in Southwest Asia in February. ***(Photo by MSgt Richard Cook)***

The local base operating support contractor at the deployed location helped CEMIRT make the final connection into the host nation power supply

able to complete the project in nine days. The greatest push was to get power connected in time for the contractor, who had to test the hangar's huge air conditioning units and get the phase rotation correct on all three units, to do his work. But working with the troops from the 49th was an awesome experience. They did an outstanding job."

Hooking to commercial power not only freed up critical generator assets for use at other deployed locations, but also resulted in a cost avoidance of more than $1.5 million.

AFCAP also played an important role in the B-2 shelter construction project. The AFCAP contractor, Readiness Management Support, was called on to acquire and expedite delivery of the construction equipment necessary to erect the hangars and the electrical systems required for CEMIRT and the 49th MMS to install power.

Within 10 days of notification to proceed, RMS gathered the necessary equipment, including such items as a 7.5-ton crane and a specially manufactured high-voltage stepdown transformer, delivered them to Dubai International Airport in the United Arab Emirates, and made arrangements for a Ukrainian IL-76 aircraft to fly the package to its final destination. The necessary equipment and supplies were on site in time to meet up with the B-2 shelter systems, which arrived by sea. *(Lois Walker, HQ AFCESA Historian)*